



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
PRINCE WILLIAM REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
SEPTEMBER 23, 2009

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you tonight. The Prince William Regional Chamber of Commerce provides an invaluable resource to Hispanic and other businesses throughout the County. As you all know, business—like politics—is predicated in large part on building strong relationships. I commend you for taking the time to be involved with the Chamber and for attending tonight's networking reception.

Hispanic small businesses are the fastest growing segment of our nation's economy. Today, there are close to three million Hispanic-owned businesses in the United States, and they generate nearly \$400 billion in annual revenues. The number of businesses owned by Hispanic women has more than doubled over the past ten years. These businesses now constitute one-third of all Hispanic businesses and generate \$45 billion in annual sales.

These encouraging statistics are, in part, an outgrowth of the growing power of Hispanic consumers, which today have a purchasing power of

nearly \$600 billion annually. But your successes cannot be attributed solely—or even largely—to the growth of Hispanics in our nation. Your successes are due to your hard work, determination, and—I will add—fearlessness. As you know well, a great idea does not equal a great business product. Many hours of sweat and toil are necessary to bring a business concept to life—para poder ver el fruto de nuestro trabajo. I am sure that every one of you, at one point during your career, took a significant risk to invest money into a company or product. I applaud you for taking these risks and for running successful businesses.

Despite this phenomenal growth, Hispanic businesses—like all businesses—face challenges in our recovering economy. Gaining access to capital has become increasingly difficult. Health care costs have skyrocketed in recent years. High gas prices have made transporting goods more expensive.

We in Congress recognize these problems and have been working hard to address them. In February, we passed the Recovery Act, which made landmark investments in our nation's economy and provided significant help to small businesses. As part of the Recovery Act, the Small Business Administration has expanded the availability of capital to small businesses by eliminating certain borrower fees. The SBA is also

helping banks extend credit to small businesses by guaranteeing a greater percentage of those loans.

The Recovery Act also contained a number of tax provisions that are benefitting small businesses across the nation. I want to briefly highlight two of them. One provision is boosting the cash flow of small businesses by allowing them to carry back losses incurred in 2008 for up to five years, instead of two years. Another provision would extend through the end of this year the enhanced expensing allowance. This provision will allow a small business to deduct up to \$250,000 of assets it purchased in 2009, giving small business owners the incentive to invest in their companies today.

In part due to these measures, we can see a brighter economic future on the horizon. The economic confidence index among small business owners grew to 89.8, a jump of 7.7 points over July.

These rosier economic indicators give us reason to be hopeful that our economy is rebounding. But I recognize that Hispanic small businesses do not always face a level playing field as you strive to grow your business.

To examine the barriers Hispanic businesses face today, I and other members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus formed the Corporate America Task Force. One of the Task Force's goals is to work with companies to increase their support of Hispanic-owned businesses. Last week, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus hosted its annual public policy conference during which we received the preliminary results of a survey measuring the participation of Hispanics in corporate America. The results were encouraging. More companies now recognize that they must tap into the growing pool of talented Hispanic candidates for all levels of their workforce. They understand that a Hispanic-inclusive workforce will contribute to higher creativity and innovation, resulting in a more productive company. Nonetheless, the survey results showed that progress still needs to be made before Hispanics are represented at a level in line with their economic conditions and purchasing power.

Breaking down barriers in the business world is something that all of you have experienced. But you got to where you are today not only through hard work and perseverance but also because someone along the way—a parent, relative, coach, or teacher—gave you some good advice and led you in the right direction. That person may have challenged you to attend high school, college, or graduate school when no one else in your family had gone that far. Each of us is where we are today because

someone gave us that helping hand—that push down a certain path that changed the way we envisioned our lives.

I hope that each of you feels a sense of responsibility to provide that push to someone young in your community. I hope that each of you will take a role in the lives of our nation's youths, whether it is by sponsoring a Little League team, funding a scholarship, mentoring a teenager, or welcoming an intern to join your business. Education is the key to success in our society. But too many young people—especially Hispanic youths—do not realize how important education is to their growth and development. They see school as something they have to endure, not as the key to their future. That does not have to be the case. Each of you is a role model to the Hispanic youth in your communities. They look up to you and see not just a successful businessperson but a successful Hispanic businessperson. They can relate to your upbringing and to your struggles. And, by seeing where you are today, they can also envision their own successes tomorrow. I urge you to get involved and make a difference for the young people in our communities.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I wish each of you many successes in the future.